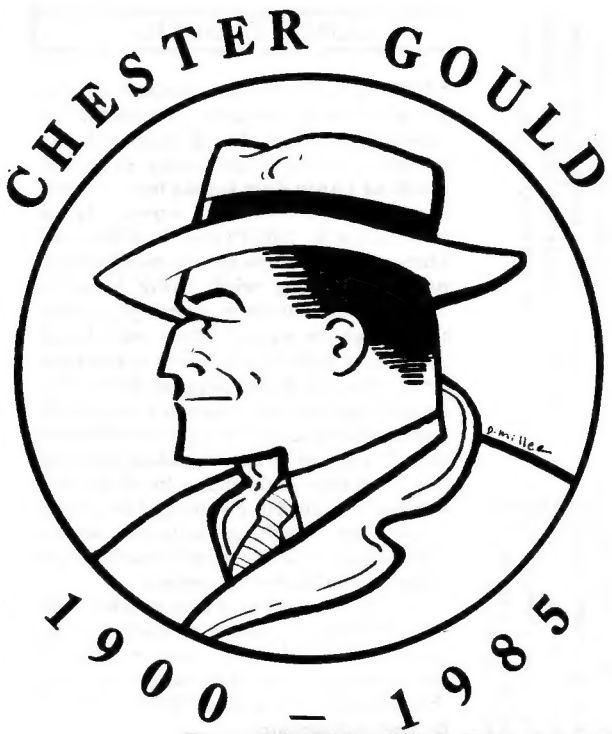

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SHOULD COMIC CHARACTERS HAVE THE RIGHT TO DIE?

Comic strips have a natural lifetime, and any cartoonist ought to be able to quit or retire without fear that his syndicate will hire some hack illustrator to keep the work doing. It's time syndicates stopped maiming their comic strips by passing them on to official plagiarists. It's also time that the would-be successors of comic strips had more respect for their own talents and for the work of those who created something original. If some-one wants to be a cartoonist, let's see him develop his own strip instead of taking over the duties of someone else's. We've got too many comic strip corpses being propped up and passed for living by new cartoonists who ought to be doing something of their own. If a cartoonist isn't good enough to make it on his own work, he had no business being in the newspaper.

Bill Watterson
from a speech given at Ohio State
reprinted in WITTY WORLD 8.

VIOLENT TURTLES IN TOWN

The National Coalition on Television Violence counted 194 separate violent acts in the big screen version of Eastman and Laird's TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES which dominated the mall scene in April and May of 1990. The authors will have to answer to this on Connie Chung's show in May. Question is whether or not fantasy violence is the same as real violence and what has caused the phenomenal success of TMNT? I know the real fans of this series are little kids. My friend, Clara, helps out at a day care center in Albany, California, and she saw one little five year old boy drawing not only each of the turtles, but all of the weaponry, and he could spell their names just as I could spell the names of the Three Musketeers when I was his age.

Topps has come out with the TMNT bubble gum card series and I saw these cards for sale at twice the price in a local comic book store. That's not ethical, guys. Those cards just came out and you're ripping off little kids for two bits. Knock it off!

DICK TRACY

Dick Tracy sprang from the pen of Chester Gould in 1931 when Prohibition was still the law of the land and gangsters like Al Capone and Bugsy Siegel shot up the landscape at will. At first, Gould was inspired by newspaper reports of crimes, but soon gangster movies like THE PUBLIC ENEMY (1931), LITTLE CAESAR, and SCARFACE would make their mark on the tone and texture of his comic strip. Gould's grotesque villains came from the nether world of pulp magazines like BLACK MASK and DETECTIVE BOOK. They were typified by a specific physical characteristic like the flat head of Flattop, the tiny face of Little Face, the wrinkles of Prune Face, and the acrid odor of B. O. Plenty. Dick started his career in law enforcement as Plainclothes Tracy. Gould knew that a man in uniform was limited and he wanted Dick to be a more flexible detective. That's why he invented the electronic gadgets that gave Tracy the same edge Doc Savage had. With his two-way wrist radio Dick could contact his sidekick Pat Patton seconds after he spotted the Mole. Later on the radio was upgraded to a wrist television, and in 1986, with Rick Fletcher illustrating the scripts of Max Allan Collins, Dick got his wrist computer.

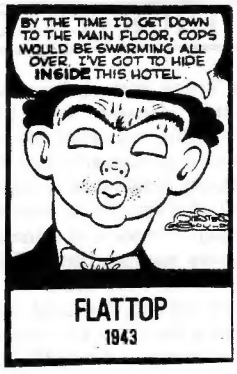
Gould, a college man, kept up with the advances of contemporary science and wrote the new technology into his strip, but what made the strip successful from day one was his suspenseful plotting.

The daily comic strips established continuity for the reader in that pre-television period and when I was growing up in the thirties, anyone you talked to knew what was happening to Dick Tracy and Little Orphan Annie and a lot of other popular characters. The adventure strips imitated the silent serials of the twenties and the cliffhanger format was well established by the time Gould hit pay dirt with his mid-American version of Sherlock Holmes. Millions of people followed DICK TRACY in the thirties and since syndicated cartoonists got a royalty per strip per paper, Gould was a rich cartoonist by the close of the decade. I first heard the strip read by my dad then by Uncle Somebody who read the funnies over the radio when I was four or five years old; I was still following it in the fifties when I joined the Navy.

Chester Gould was born November 20, 1900, the son of Alice Miller and Gilbert R. Gould. He grew up in Pawnee, Oklahoma, and moved to Chicago on September 1, 1921, to begin his career as a cartoonist. Gould got a degree in Marketing from Northwestern. He married Edna Gauger in 1926 and by 1935 he had established his home in Woodstock, Illinois. He drew DICK TRACY for 46 years. The first strip appeared in the Detroit MIRROR on October 4, 1931. Gould retired in December of 1977 and passed the strip along to a new writer/artist team. He died in May of 1985.

Mutual put Dick Tracy on a radio show in 1935. By 1938, you could hear the adventures of Dick and Tess Trueheart, Junior Tracy, Pat Patton, and Chief Brandon everyday at 5 pm. In 1937, Dick Tracy was in the movies. Ralph Byrd starred in the four Republic serials: DICK TRACY, DICK TRACY RETURNS, DICK TRACY'S G-MEN, AND DICK TRACY VS. CRIME, INC. They were stiff but fun. In the last one, Dick fought an invisible villain called The Ghost. Tess was dropped from the serial and Dick's girl friend Gwen was played by Kay Hughes. Each chapter of a serial had a cliffhanger which left the hero or someone close to him in jeopardy. I remember Byrd trapped in an elevator that was filling up with water. Hey, we had to wait until the next Friday, *a whole week*, to see whether or not Dick drowned in that damned elevator while the villain was getting away. Well, of course, Dick was going to get out somehow. How could they continue the show with a dead detective? But the kid in me never thought that way. I spent part of the week truly concerned about the fate of Tracy and I was always relieved when he escaped. Onscreen, Dick fought mystery rays and wingless airships. In DICK TRACY'S G-MEN, Gwen was played by Phyllis Isley who later became a top actress named Jennifer Jones. The Tracy serials ran to sixty episodes, the longest since the silent days of Pearl White. Serials were revived in the mid-seventies with STAR WARS and RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK and the form has contributed to the success of a number of new film companies. It was only fitting that Disney turn Dick Tracy into a mega-serial. Morgan Conway played Tracy in the first movie about the character [RKO, 1945], but Ralph Byrd returned for the three sequels, DICK TRACY MEETS CUEBALL, DICK TRACY MEETS GRUESOME, and DICK TRACY'S DILEMMA. Byrd was cast in the first television series [1950-5l], but he died in 1952 and the series was cancelled.

Dick was often parodied. A square-jawed, no-nonsense detective who never had his hat knocked off or his black suit wrinkled was too good a target to pass up and when Al Capp asked Gould if he could parody Dick in *L'il Abner*, Gould said, sure, go ahead. So it was that Fearless Fosdick entered Dogpatch. L'il Abner Yokum read Fearless Fosdick every day and became one of the invulnerable detective's most ardent fans. Abner went so far as joining the local Fosdick Fan Club and swearing an oath to do everything his hero did. What everyone was worrying about in those days was whether Abner would ever marry Daisy Mae and when Abner joined the Fosdick Fan Club, the fans figured they were safe, because everyone knew Fosdick would *never ever* marry Prudence



Pimpleton. ***But he did!*** Only ***his*** marriage to the square-jawed spinster took place in a dream and Abner Yokum found himself married ***for real!*** Fosdick was an amazing character, one who went on fighting crime even after he was shot full of holes like a swiss cheese. The parody went on for years with Chester Gould's permission. Capp always wanted Gould to reciprocate, to play the game with him and parody L'il Abner in DICK TRACY, but Gould never did. His own stories were too close to parody. Who but Gould would have Breathless Mahoney stab a woman in the back with a pair of garden shears when she could have knocked the woman out easily? The violence in DICK TRACY was always overdone, a point Capp emphasized well in FEARLESS FOSDICK.

In THE GREAT PIGGY BANK ROBBERY, animator Bob Clampett turned Daffy Duck into Duck Twacy, who was menaced by colorful villains like Neon Noodle. MAD MAGAZINE took on Tracy several times and Bill Elder turned him into ***Tick Dacey*** in his PANIC parody in 1954.

Dick Tracy managed to survive all of the social changes that killed off his peers, guys like Moon Mullins, Sparky Watts, Smilin' Jack, The Gumps and Abbie and Slats. Space characters like Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers have been revived periodically, but they no longer have any continuity. Dick Tracy is still in the funny papers in 1990. 59 years of continuity.

Over the years Chester Gould had numerous assistants, including Dick Moores and Russell Stamm, but most of the time he had a staff of at least four assistants. His brother Ray did the lettering, pencilled and inked back-grounds and minor figures, and wrote and drew the CRIMESTOPPERS TEXTBOOK. He also drew the Autolite ads many attributed to Gould.

When Gould decided to retire in 1977, he turned the strip over to Rick Fletcher and Max Allan Collins. The current strip is written by Collins and drawn by Dick Locher, an editorial cartoonist who took over when Rick Fletcher died suddenly.

Locher, according to Max [See Guest Editorial in Comic Buyer's Guide 851, March 9, 1990, p. 4.], was the first assistant of Gould's to do extensive pencilling and inking on the strip. Readers will be pleased to know that a selection of stories from the past and present will appear in St. Martin's DICK TRACY CASEBOOK out later this summer.

On the big screen in the wake of the Salkind Superman series and Batman, DICK TRACY stars Warren Beatty as Dick, Madonna as Breathless Mahoney, and Dustin Hoffman as Mumbles.

-CLAY GEERDES

There are two collections of Dick Tracy stories: THE CELEBRATED CASES OF DICK TRACY: 1931-1951. New York Bonanza Books, 1970. and DICK TRACY, AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS DETECTIVE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHESTER GOULD'S IMMORTAL SLEUTH. New Jersey: Secaucus Press, 1987. The DICK TRACY comic strip was reprinted routinely in SUPER COMICS in the forties and there are quite a few of the older DICK TRACY comic books available in comic book stores around the country.

Re the graphic novel movie tie-ins from Disney, Jean Gould O'Connell send this letter to CBG 851: ***"I would like your solid Dick Tracy/Chester Gould fans to know how upset my family and I are with Disney's choice of artwork for the Dick Tracy Graphic Novels that are preceding the Dick Tracy movie. I recently sent a letter to Disney stating that I feel this artwork is a complete desecration of my father's work. Though I am helpless to do anything, I want fans to know my feelings. It is a great contradiction to my father's work."***

COMIX PLUGOLA

The twelfth issue of Robert Pasternak's ACID MAN SOCIETY is available from CW for 50¢/stamp.

JAKA'S STORY continues in Dave Sim's CEREBUS 17 at your local comic book store.

FIRE SALE is a nice pot pourri by many of the surviving underground cartoonists. Rip Off Press put this one together as a benefit comic for Larry Todd who tells the story of the fire that destroyed his place in Willits. Gruesome stuff. We hope Larry has recuperated from his ordeal. Rip Off Press is now located in Auburn, Calif. 95604. POB 4686. Send a buck for their catalog.

John Wade III is doing a comedy sheet, a sample of which you received with this mailing of CW. If you would like to write to him or contribute, he lives at 4818 Gaywood Drive, Fort Wayne, IND 46806.

Last Gasp, 2180 Bryant Street, San Francisco, CA 94110. $2 gets you Last Gasp's latest catalog. The infamous Cherry Poptart is on the cover to promote the collection of Cherry's adventures due out later this year. The trucker's favorite, CHERRY is in her 9th issue.

ALL COVER COMICS is 50¢/stamp from Randy Paske, 4841 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741-9631. Note to all concerned, two other people have used this idea and title. I see a lot of duplication these days in F/X and elsewhere. This leads to mix-ups later on when people order stuff.

EL VIBORA 122 has a nice cover by Gilbert Shelton. This mag routinely reprints the work of Crumb and Charles Burns in Spanish. $8 pp from J. M. Berenguer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. 08003. Adults only.

COMIX PLUGOLA

NORMAL LIFE is just another sitcom about a boring suburban white family where the laugh track does all the laughing. I hate laugh tracks almost as much as I hate dust jacket hype. Could there be anything worse than AMERICA'S SHITTIEST VIDEOS? They ought to show the moments after, parents sitting with their kids in intensive care at the hospital, guys with their legs in casts. When one local columnist called this show organized child abuse, he had it pegged. With a few terminally cute exceptions, it's a show for parents who secretly want to off their kids. It's got to be the stupidest concept I've seen this year with a lot of people sitting in a studio clapping like clods when there is nothing live to clap about. Talk about an insult to the public. Talk about assholism for the masses.

If I haven't said how much I hate that Disney restyling of Dick Tracy, consider it said. I was always a fan of Chester Gould and agree with his family that the artwork in BAY CITY BLUES is beyond redemption.

When Connie Chung tried to squeeze Marlon Brando into the mold, she more than met her match as he ignored her inane questions and said what he wanted to say to the public while the tape was rolling. Warren Beatty did just the opposite when Barbara Walters cornered him on the set of Dick Tracy for that noninterview in March. Instead of ignoring her and having his say, he just sat there like a clod and said nothing. By his smile, you could tell he held Walters in little esteem, but what did the prime time listener get out of that interchange? Well, we know Warren dug Dick Tracy when he was a kid and the movie looks like a lot of latex fun.

Explain this one to me. People are stepping over the homeless and poor in San Francisco to pay as much as $55 to sit and watch the poor and homeless onstage in LES MISERABLES. Probably the same people who didn't see enough hippies and love children on the streets in 1969 so they paid to see HAIR.

FREE ICE CREAM and YOUR DIRTY LIL' COMIC 3 are 50¢/stamp each from Randy H. Crawford, 911 Park St. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241. BIG SISTER 2 is $1/stamp. I LOVE CAT-GIRLS, TOO is $1/stamp. PLAIN BROWN WRAPPER SPECIAL NUMBER THREE is $1.69/stamp. Adults only. You should remember to send an age statement with all orders for underground or newave comix.

CONTINUUM is 50¢ pp from Concrete Caverns Graphix, 70-A Greenwich Ave., NY, NY 10011. MEAN STREETS 3 from the same address.

REAL SCREAM COMICS 17 [DZ] is $2 from Mike Culpepper, 808 Stanley St., Nelson, B. C. V1L 1N7.

ROAD SALT 1 is $1.50 pp from J. P. Crangle, POB 22, Syracuse, N Y 13215-0022. Send him an extra buck and beg for his Cartoon Tips. Good stuff for beginners. Crangle teaches a cartooning class.